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TO KLONDIKE BY SEA

By Geraldine Bonner

The Californian novelist describes with graphic accuracy the stirring scenes at the wharf when ships sail for the Klondike.

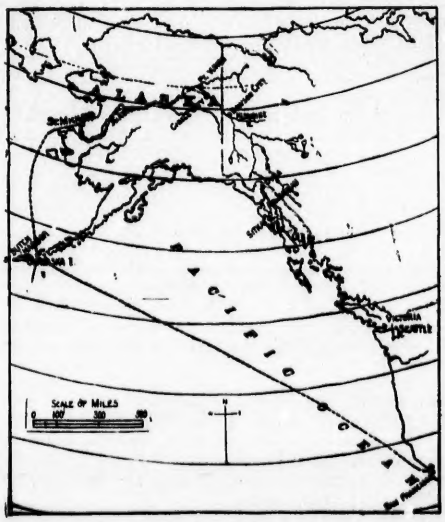
THE reports of the terrors of Chilcoot Pass, combined with the lateness of the season, have turned the attention of the Klondike argonauts to the sea route. This is by steamer to St. Michaels, at the mouth of the Yukon, and thence by steam or gasoline launch up the river to Dawson, a trip of some five weeks in length.

Vessels northward bound have been leaving San Francisco for the last month, notwithstanding the gloomy prophecies of those who know the country. Predictions are rife that many of these expeditions will be frozen up all winter between St. Michaels and Dawson, that the boats will run a good chance of being broken by the ice pressure, and the passengers must face the possibility of starving.

The ticket costs $300, or $350 from San Francisco to Dawson, with, in most cases, a guarantee to furnish provisions at $2 a day per head if the expedition is detained in the river by early frosts.

The prospect of wintering in a small launch, packed like cattle, on an Arctic river, fed upon the sort of provender a coasting steamer will carry for an emergency supply, has not damped the ardor of the new argonauts. The traditions of '49 still survive in California, and the making of the great pioneer fortunes is the romance that the Californian is bred up on.

But the hardships of those who crossed the plains in '49 are said to be slight in comparison with what the Klondike emigrants may expect from hunger and cold. Meantime, ship after ship weighs anchor and, sunk to the gunwale, puts out to sea with her load of human freight for the conquest of Fortune.



The departure of one of these vessels is like a general water-front picnic. The first ships went with a show of method and punctuality. But later ones, lured to risk the journey by the demands for transportation, have gone with a fine disregard for time or tide.

"Sufficient for the word to pass that this old man in the fur cap was a passenger."

Passengers have sat on their luggage on the wharf for two days while the stevedores packed the freight in a rambling and irresponsible manner. The vessel advertised to go on Monday at 4 P. M. is lucky if it gets off on Wednesday at the same hour. Yet a universal air of good humor and gaiety prevails. The gold-seekers are determined to go off bravely, and hope keeps up their spirits.

The *Humboldt*, a large, lumbering coast steamer, fitted up in a few days with extra accommodations, and deep in the water with her immense load, was only twenty-four hours behind her time of leaving.

At four o'clock, the hour advertised for her departure, the dock was crowded with idlers and passengers, and almost impassable with freight and personal baggage.

Sufficient for the word to pass that this old man in the fur cap was a passenger, or that group of ugly, pale-faced women were going to open a boarding house in Dawson, for a crowd to collect about them and general conversation to ensue. The travelers told their plans and hopes to the gaping circle, and it answered back offering suggestions and advice.

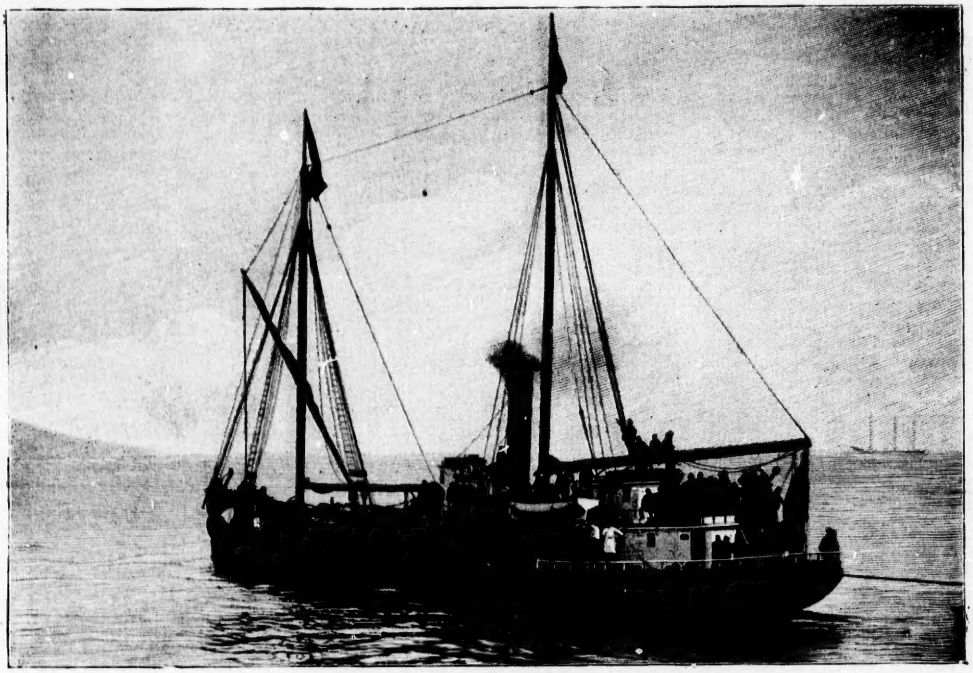
Behind and around outsiders scrambled and pushed to see what was going on. Sweating stevedores roared orders at each other, and brushed back the people from the freight they carried away piece by piece.

Confusion, good-humored but terrific, prevailed. A few men in the caps of officers jostled about, shouting at each other, yelling at the stevedores and writing between whiles in note books. But the crowd ruled things, walked over everything, sat on everything, climbed upon everything, and jeered and offered advice alternately.

At four o'clock the wharf was deep in freight all along where the *Humboldt* lay.

night and probably not the next day, a hilarious, irresponsible sort of good humor prevailed. The travelers were almost all in a state of feverish high spirits.

A good many of the men had been taking a farewell tipple, and glassy-eyed and gay, stood in circles of glassy-eyed friends and talked of the great times coming. Most of them were fine looking fellows, strong, red and beefy, good men to fight the fight of the pioneer.



THE "NORTH FORK" CLEARS FOR THE NORTH.

Personal effects were arranged in large piles upon which the owners sat. A Klondike outfit is a serious and extensive matter. There were old-fashioned trunks roughly corded, and newly bought trunks gleaming in varnish and brass, many solid wooden chests such as sailors use, and long bags of white duck stuffed to the mouth, which was drawn up with a rope and tied.

Shovels and picks, miners' pans and saws of all sizes laid between boards and strapped together were a part of every outfit. Provident parties had laid in supplies of flour, of candles, of kerosene, of cottolene, of canned goods, and many square wooden boxes which bore the names of grocery firms.

The Arctic wardrobes lay on the top of the heaps. They consisted mostly of long rubber boots, winter flannels, snow stockings, such as are worn with snowshoes, big fur coats, jackets of flannel and corduroy, lined with leather, and fur caps or "Klondike helmets," as the shops call them now.

Almost every outfit included a small sheet-iron stove, which came to pieces and folded together in a box. Back and around all this lay the ship's own stores, sacks upon sacks of onions and potatoes, which the crowd found useful as seats, the disjointed iron carcasses of what looked like half a dozen ships' boilers, hundreds of boxes, and in the background a good sized launch, standing on a truck.

This launch had to be squeezed in somewhere, since it was what the passengers were going up the Yukon in.

Though it was obvious the *Humboldt* would not sail that

Upon some of the heaps of baggage women and children sat roosting, and these little parties did not look so joyful. Only the small boys, in their Sunday suits, enjoyed their importance, and told the loungers they "weren't going up till the spring. It was too cold now for the baby. But they'd come down to see popper off."

There were not many women passengers; and they were distinguished neither by youth nor good looks. One elderly woman, pale and delicate, as though she had arisen from a sick bed, sat on the largest pile of luggage on the wharf, with a young girl beside her. The girl was the focus of many glances as the future belle of Klondike, and the next great American heiress to be scrambled for by European nobles.

She was about fourteen, fat, freckled, sandy-haired, but with a jolly, bright face and a pair of shrewd, honest eyes —upon the whole a first-rate looking girl, and very much the type of the bonanza heiress of California.

At six o'clock the *Humboldt* was still placidly resting at her moorings, the wharf still breast-high in freight, still thick with people, the legend still passing from mouth to mouth that it was to sail that night. The next night at seven it did weigh anchor, which was not so bad for a scratch Klondike tramp.

The *North Fork's* record of departure was not so creditable. Is was advertised to sail on Wednesday at two, and did so on Friday at twelve.

"Are you certain the boat will leave at that hour?" was asked the clerk at the office.

"It may be a little later," said this accurate person, "because the passengers are not always on time."

The stories of what might befall the augonauts who went to Dawson by sea had been spreading, and the *North Fork's* sailing drew as large a crowd as a popular *première*. At two the people were flocking over the cobbles and up the wide-shadowed length of the dock, at the end of which an apex of turquoise sea appeared, and which oscillated as with an earthquake under the wheels of immense drays.

The *North Fork*, a small coasting steamer, of that kind that go up rivers in the East, was already low in the water. From the lower deck to the roof of the cabin a bulkhead had been raised, and this was filled in, level with the cabin top, with coal.

On top of that sacks of potatoes and onions were tied, the contents only restrained from breaking forth by a lacing of cord. Two cranes were at work at bow and stern lowering freight into the hold.

And the usual number of black-faced, perspiring men were rushing hither and thither carrying at one time raw sides of beef, at another rolled-up mattresses, then sacks of flour, pieces of iron, sides of bacon, canvas bags bulging with their contents, trunks, fur coats—anything they happened to find in their way.

The confusion was worse than at the leaving of the *Humboldt*, for the crowd was greater, the vessel smaller, and the attempts to maintain system or order even more disregarded.

Every few moments trucks drawn by immense dray horses thundered up the wharf, the driver roaring for gangway. There was a pushing and scrambling to either side, the hind wheels were backed fiercely into the heart of the crowd, and the load of luggage thrown on the planks. The owners jumped out on top of it, and the officers and stevedores closed in upon the pile, whence a great shouting and cursing arose.

The truck went rumbling away, to be met by others, roaring in, which in their turn backed and wheeled and stamped a way outward and inward, the drivers swearing at each other in friendly volubility, while their long whips hissed over the backs of their horses.

The departure of the *North Fork* was regarded as an occasion of special interest, since several sensational people were advertised among the passengers.

A lady who was to take a piano, a trick horse and a St. Bernard dog were looked for but not found. An actress who had had a lively divorce suit and was going to Dawson to open a dance hall, was another interesting figure who did not materialize. One family brought on a large supply of stringed instruments in nicely made, new cloth cases; but whether they were for the furnishing of a dance hall or merely the means of recreation of a musical party, was not known.

More women seemed to go this time than on any of the previous expeditions. The youngest female passenger was a little girl of three; the eldest, the mother of a family of ugly daughters who were going to open a boarding house in Dawson—"grub-stake" the boarders—and make a fortune.

They were plain, red haired, small and neat; all wore sailor hats and blue frieze coats. The enormous quantity of personal luggage they surrounded spoke well for the comfort of their future home. They had rolls of mattresses and blankets and coverlets, fur coats and capes, a pile of small trunks, several of the duck, sausage-shaped bags, a pail with a year's numbers of one of the ten-cent maga zines—the first library for Klondike, a wicker rocking chair and half a dozen telescope baskets.

They fixed their cabins, two on the afterdeck, while the crowd sat high on sacks of potatoes and looked in enviously. Such cabins as they were! A child could not have stretched itself out in the upper berth. And the blankets and the chair and the mattresses and the fur capes overflowed to the deck among the coal and the

THE "HUMBOLDT'S" PROSPECTIVE MILLIONAIRES.

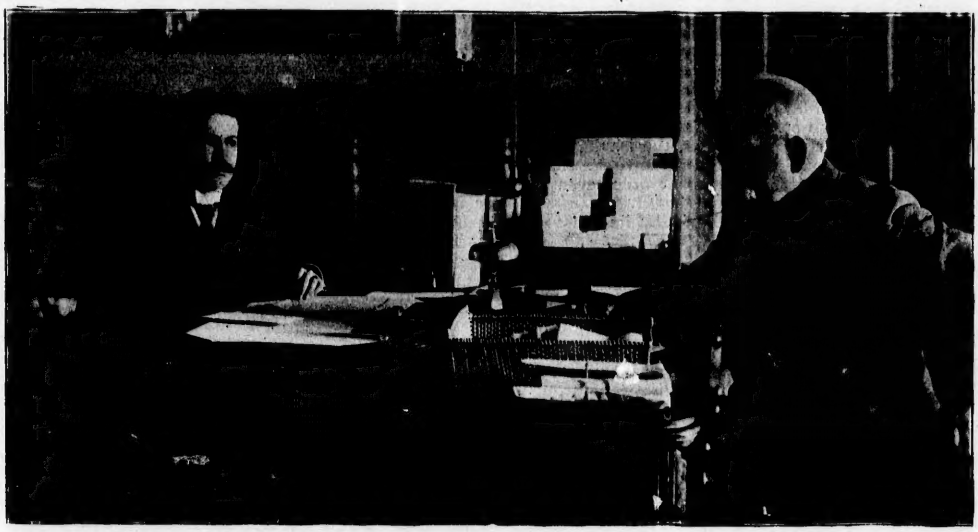
potatoes. The red-haired girls looked at the cabins and then at the luggage, and began to realize what it was to be pioneers.

This *North Fork* ship will bring civilization into Dawson. For, besides music and ten-cent magazines, it carries a barber's outfit. The chair was packed in a wooden case, and was owned by a thin, sickly young man in corduroys. When the moment arrived for putting it in the hold a hitch arose; the officers and stevedores argued with the young man, the shouting waxed high, and it looked as if Dawson was going to be deprived of its tonsorial establishment. But the excitement simmered down, and the chair was hoisted in one of the hammocks and dropped down into the hold.

Most articles that were out of the common run seemed to create disturbance. A miner's pump, an elaborate affair, after being the subject of fierce argument, was intrusted to a boy to carry aboard, and midway on the narrow gangplank came apart and dropped its upper half into the sea. The boy looked rather foolish, but carried on the remains.

At six o'clock there was a rumor that the vessel would not go till seven the next morning, and the crowd, feeling hungry, began to thin. All the families *en route* for the diggings had packed themselves away in their contracted quarters and prepared to stay there. Two days afterward they were still lying at the wharf.

Finally, however, the *North Fork* did weigh anchor and dropped down the bay, towing behind her the *Mare Island*, for the trip up the Yukon.



SECRETARY OF THE NAVY LONG AT HIS DESK.